

Microbiology

October 30, 1956.

Dr. Edward Dempsey
Department of Anatomy

Dear Ed:

Since our conversation a week ago, I have given considerable thought to your request for suggestions regarding the curriculum and the administration of the medical school. Both because my knowledge is limited, and because I think it would best preserve the desirable attitudes and traditions of the school, I would like to limit my remarks to areas of direct concern to this department.

1. During the past two years we have been teaching elementary genetics, with special attention to problems in microbial genetics. Despite our attempts to use examples from human genetics, it seems that within the time which we can allot to it, the coverage of this subject is still inadequate for the proper training of medical students in the increasingly important field of human heredity. I believe that with the advances in medicine, it will become more and more apparent that the gene is a most important etiologic agent of disease and an ever present critical factor in the pathogenesis and treatment of disease. I would, therefore, suggest that serious attention be given to augmenting instruction in this area.

2. Another problem that we face is that of presenting microbiology as a basic science and having it meet the students' demands for an early encounter with the clinical aspects of infectious diseases. While it would be wrong to sacrifice in any way the fundamental scientific treatment of microbiology, it might be possible nevertheless by some device to obtain a better student response and to achieve a desirable correlation in our teaching. I would suggest an appointment for someone to serve jointly in the Department of Medicine and in the Department of Microbiology, sharing his time and teaching efforts between the two departments.

3. Our most serious administrative problem has been with the maintenance of services and the remodeling of laboratories and facilities. Dependence on the present crew has usually led to delays which are costly in time and money. At present we urgently need a laboratory room to devote to physical studies of proteins, nucleic acids and polyphosphates. We have a workable idea for providing space, and I am confident we can get the money to equip the laboratory. What has dampened my enthusiasm for this project is the anticipation of the complications and delays that invariably accompany such an effort. Since we must plan for continuing technological advances in all departments and periodic major building and remodeling projects, in several departments, some sophisticated and efficient mechanism for this should be worked out.

Sincerely yours,

AK/McK

Arthur Kornberg.